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Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

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A NEW EMANCIPATION

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Text: "But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him." John 11:10.

The Quakers have made a good deal of the doctrine of the inner light. If you have ever been present in a real Quaker meeting you have been moved, undoubtedly by the sight of eager people whose hearts were waiting for that word, that inner inspiration to speak--an inspiration they called the inner light. By this they mean a certain "divine intuition" that suggests the communion of a man with God, that leads a man out into right conduct, that unfolds the future for him perhaps, but most of all gives him the inner assurance of rightness and of favor at the hands of God. In these later days the Oxford groups have made a good deal of this idea of guidance and in spite of the fact there are some of us who believe their interpretation is not always dependable, the simple fact remains there is something of very great significance in the idea that God communicates His knowledge, His preference, His will to men. Thousands will testify to the fact. Tens of thousands will tell you that their life has been ordered and planned on the basis of the conviction that God reveals to them His will.

The fact of the inner light remains. There is a very great need that we shall bring our attention back to this simple fact of human experience. The Greeks had a way of saying that enthusiasm was the fire of the soul. I suppose this inner light that I have been speaking of might be called the fire of the soul. "If a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. If he walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world."

The human soul is the most interesting study and the most rewarding field of investigation into which men have ever gone, just because of the fact that the human soul is the most amazing thing of all creation--the most astounding thing that you will find anywhere in the universe. Flying over the midwest this week I was tremendously moved by what I think is one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen. We were cruising at about 11,000 feet elevation and between the plane and the earth there was a great bank of clouds. The morning sun was coming up and every little ripple in the cloud was tinted with a bit of red and as the sun came higher these protuberances caught the new ray of the sun and reflected it back. Somebody sitting near me said, "Did you ever see anything so wonderful," and I replied that I never did and then instantly it occurred to me that even more wonderful than the cloud was the pilot who flew the plane above the clouds. More significant, more beautiful, more moving, more astounding, more interesting than anything that man has ever made is man himself and more amazing than anything in this world in which he lives, is the one who lives in this world. Men have spent their lifetime studying other things that are of great interest, but nothing is as interesting, as Pope says, as the study of man. Huber, the Swiss scientist spent a lifetime studying bees. Maeterlinck spent many years studying the bees and ants, but the human soul is an even more and exhaustless study. Through all the centuries men have been studying the strange manifestations of human behavior. Many studies run out quickly, but the study of the human soul is never exhausted.

The psychologists, I think, have one of the most fascinating fields into which the human mind ever goes and they are making a very great deal of progress.

A good many things that a few years ago were a mystery are today plain because of the findings of the psychologist, but there are many mysteries still left. There is the mystery of personality and even more, there is this mystery of the inner fire, this strange thing that happens within the soul of an individual that transforms him. No one knows where it will break out. It is no stranger to the poorest and the humblest and it is likewise to be found among the rich and the strong. No one knows when life may be revolutionized and no one knows when some soul dominated by a great idea will walk across the face of the earth and change life for millions.

No one knows what one fired soul can accomplish, for the history of the race has been written in terms of these transfigured souls, these personalities set on fire. Lincoln was such a one. His life is a record of a series of transfigurations that produced transformations and it was an altogether different lad that returned to New Salem from that slave auction in New Orleans. Lincoln went down to New Orleans a raw, crude, country boy. He came back with a great fire kindled in his soul. You could not possibly explain the life of Abraham Lincoln and leave out of the account the thing that happened to him there before an auction block when he saw that mulatto girl being sold like merchandise. Something happened to the soul of Lincoln in the course of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. He was by this time a lawyer of ability. He was by this time a man of power and of experience, but in those contests with the great Stephen A. Douglas (and don't forget that Stephen A. Douglas was a great statesman in his day) something happened in the soul of Abraham Lincoln, and deep and abiding convictions were born from which he could never escape.

Then, there came those trying terrible days in the White House when one crisis after another was to be met, when there was lighted within the soul of the president a fire that carried him through, and when men asked him if he was not anxious to know whether or not God was on his side, he replied, with the spirit of light upon him, "My great concern is not that God is on my side but that I am on God's side." It is a long way from that callow youth who wrote an essay in an attempt to establish the major principles of atheism to this devout man in the White House whose whole life is spent for the one purpose of knowing and following the will of God. You cannot explain him on his parentage. Nancy Hanks was a lovely country girl and a rare spirit, but there is nothing to indicate that she was a genius. Thomas Lincoln has never been adequately dealt with and has never had his fair share of appreciation or approval. Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham Lincoln, was much more than an ordinary man, even in his day, but he was not a genius. You cannot explain Abraham Lincoln on the basis of his parentage and you cannot explain it on the basis of his education. Lying there in front of the fire, reading out those pages by the flickering glare of the flame as it leaped from the logs, Abraham Lincoln imbibed the simple rudiments of reading, writing and figuring, but you simply cannot explain Abraham Lincoln on the basis of those few textbooks.

If I could be some men, instead of the man I am, there are a few men I would like to have been. Perhaps not for the total of life, but at least for some minutes. I would like to think I was the one who gave to Abraham Lincoln, Weems' "Life of Washington." I know that Weems' "Life of Washington" does not stand today as the classic in history and I know that there is a good deal that can be alleged against it as an historical study, but Mr. Lincoln is the authority for saying that out of Weems' "Life of Washington" something came that found its way into his own soul. What would you give to be able to say that you were the one who had given to Abraham Lincoln, Weems' "Life of Washington?" What do you suppose it would mean to you?

There was nothing in his education that would explain his career. He was not a college graduate. He held no college degrees. He never attended law school.

I think he knew about as much law as a lot of folks that have, but he never attended school. He never was in a college, never stood upon the platform of a college to speak until he was a candidate for the presidency. He was not a college man. He never wrote a book. He never consciously put down anything that was ever going to be included in a book. I mean by that he never wrote it with a thought it would be in a book. He wrote his speeches and wrote letters to mothers whose sons had been saved by his charity. I think it can be said in perfect truth that he never wrote a sentence with the idea that it would ever achieve anything resembling immortality. I think it is only a tradition that the Gettysburg address, which is recognized as the greatest oration in the English language, was written on scraps of paper, one scrap being a piece of an old paper sack.

It was not in his education and it was not in his environment. It was a crude, rude, backwoods country that had never produced a genius before and it has not produced a genius since. If it was possible to produce geniuses by having them born in log cabins in a backwoods section of Kentucky, I have an idea that the price of land down there would go up suddenly and building sites for prospective homes would be at a premium, but you don't produce a genius by the fact that he is born in a wilderness. Something else happened to him. Somewhere the soul of Abraham Lincoln took fire. I think that one of the reasons was, that his soul was highly inflammable. Nobody can possibly know what may have been the influence of humble and simple people upon the soul of this impressionable youth. There were no college men in his environment. He knew no educated men. There were no inspiring personalities anywhere about him except the occasional visitor or it may have been the itinerant preacher. To my mind there is not a more impressive moment in the life of Abraham Lincoln than that moment when, having gone miles across the hills and found a preacher, he brings the preacher back to his mother's grave, for his mother has been buried for some weeks, and has this itinerant Methodist preacher, standing by his mother's grave, preach his mother's funeral sermon. It was the custom in those days, many times when deaths would occur and no minister would be within miles, that the burial would take place weeks or even months afterwards. Dr. William E. Barton, who I suppose in his day was the greatest authority on Lincoln living in America, made the statement, that, as a Kentucky preacher, he himself had held a number of services for people who had been dead as many as five years. Weeks and weeks after the death of Nancy Hanks we would find this lad standing by his mother's grave and this itinerant Methodist preacher holding her funeral service.

It was because there had come into the soul of this lad a divine something. The psychologists are powerless to explain it. The historians recognize it. Preachers talk about it, but now and again it happens within another soul. It happened in the soul of Abraham Lincoln, that God came down and set a soul aflame. It happened in the case of Dwight L. Moody. As a clerk in a shoe store in a little Massachusetts town he came under the influence of an unknown Sunday School teacher. I would like to have been the Sunday School teacher that set the soul of Dwight L. Moody on fire. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you like to be able to look back on the record of the great Moody and have the confidence or the consciousness that it was a word of yours that set that youth on fire and set him at his task? There is nothing that any man or any woman can do that is of greater significance than lighting a flame in the heart of a boy or a girl and see that one go out to warm the world.

In a little church in Baltimore they have placed a silver plate upon the altar rail indicating it was at that spot that Stanley Jones knelt one memorable night a generation ago and gave his heart to the Lord Jesus. On the record of the church there is the name of the man who was the preacher that night. The world today has forgotten his name, but the world cannot overlook Stanley Jones. Over there in Japan somebody reached the heart of a Japanese lad and somebody paid for

his transportation to America and somebody paid his tuition at Princeton and somebody saw to it that Kagawa got his education and the life of all Japan is different because of what this man has done. I would like to be able to look back and say I had some part in paying for the education of this great Japanese Christian.

You may have met such souls yourself. I saw a boy suddenly come to life in college. He had been enrolled in school for two or three years and then one day under the inspiration of a chapel speaker, this boy got a vision, he caught a glimpse of what life for him might be. Going to his room, and kneeling there beside his bed he gave his heart to God and determined on the ministry. Thereafter I saw the change come in this boy's life, I saw a new seriousness, a new purpose, dawning. His work has already begun and he is already showing signs of a great thing happening.

I remember one night in the city of Minneapolis. It has been at least fifteen years ago, or maybe more. A layman said to me, "There is a boy over here in one of these rooming houses. I met him at church last Sunday night. I would like to go and see him. Will you go with me?" So the two of us went. We climbed the flights of stairs until we came to that tiny little bit of a room up under the roof. We found this boy there and his brother. They had only two chairs and the boys sat upon the bed while their guests sat upon the chairs. I shall never forget the way that layman talked to that boy, and told him how he too had come down from the country to look for a job and how he had lined up with the church and what had happened. It was two or three weeks after, that I saw that boy come to the altar of the church and join and it was a few months after that that the boy came to say that because of the intreaties of that laymen he had found his way through and that he was going to be a minister in the church of Christ. Today he is one of the most successful young pastors in the state of Indiana. This laymen was never able to preach but he did something to a boy that night. He set his heart on fire. He lighted a light in that boy's life.

I have seen it happen. You have seen it happen again and again. I am saying to you very frankly, dear friends, that if there is anything that this old world needs this morning it is lamp lighters, it is people who can go and lift loads and light lamps and set hearts on fire and put a flame in the lives of youth and give them confidence in the world in which they are living, for we are living in a starved, heartsick world.

This is a desperate world. Contrast it, if you will, with the world of ten years ago. Men are in deadly fear of poverty. No man is sure of employment. No man's investments are safe. Democracy itself is at the cross roads. Have you ever seen in all of your life or all of your experience a world in which there was so much bitterness and hate? Have you ever known a time when so many people were unhappy or in despair? Have you ever known so much shamelessness and hopelessness as there is? Have you ever known a time when as many people were living for as many petty things as today? Have you ever known a day when there was as much futility as there is today? I look out on the world and it seems so petty and small and impotent. There is a desperate need in the world today. I mean there is a desperate need in the hearts of individual men in the world today for an old, old virtue called hope. There are literally millions of people who have well nigh surrendered hope. Hope will open doors of opportunity that nothing else will. Hope will produce good will. The reason why there is so much ill will in the world today is because there is so much hopelessness. Increase the stock of hope in the world and you will increase the store of good will. Open the door that hope may dawn and you will cure political and economic ills.

Up here in the San Joaquin Valley, where there are tens of thousands of migrants from the dust bowl, there is one camp along the Kern River which a few weeks ago had in it one thousand people, boys and girls and men and women, and the highest weekly income received by any family in that entire camp of one thousand

people, in the six month period previous had been \$9.40. There were literally scores of them that had gone weeks at a time without making a dime. They told me up there the story of a baby that was born in one of those camps and there was not the slightest thing in the way of a covering for either the mother or the baby except a gunny sack laid down over some leaves and straw and the father was helpless and hopeless. Then, one of the business men up in that county, said, "One thing I can't understand and that is how communism gets a start." I can tell you how communism gets a start. It gets a start in hopelessness. Increase the stock of hope in the world and all these things that threaten to destroy us would receive a setback.

Hope will allay the war fevers. Hope, if you please, is distinctly and definitely a spiritual product. You cannot go to Sears-Roebuck & Company and order two crates of hope sent out to your ranch. You cannot go down to one of the markets and ask for four pounds of hope to be delivered to your home. Hope does not come that way. Hope comes as men find light. Hope comes as men are touched by the living God. Hope comes as men believe that there is something more in this world than goods, and that something more is God.

This world needs today a stabilization of idealism; all over the world there is a breakdown of idealism. You cannot stabilize idealism unless somebody lives idealistically. I wonder if you can imagine what it means over in the neighborhood of the Church of All Nations for these deaconesses to go about with this plain and winsome garb to carry hope into the homes where there is no hope. I wonder if you can understand what it means in those wards at the Methodist Hospital where the free work is given. If you can understand what it means to the desperate and the poor there to have these nurses in these white uniforms come and with their unconquerable smile to bring hope into those sick rooms. I wonder if you know what it means in one of these homes where one of these girls has come out of very great need, where there is no chance for an education and then to have some one come and say there is a school, the Frances DePauw School where Spanish speaking girls can have a chance. I wonder if you can understand what it means to a boy upon whom life has closed down to have some one say, "There is a school called the Spanish American Institute where for \$120.00, a boy can be given his schooling for an entire year." The boy says, "You might as well tell me \$120,000.00 as to tell me \$120.00." "That is not it. There is a man, there is a society, a church or somebody that has provided that \$120.00 for you," you can see the door of hope open for this lad instantly. Maybe you could not be the one who left Weems' "Life of Washington" with Abraham Lincoln. Maybe you could not be the Sunday School teacher that fired the soul of Dwight L. Moody. Kagawa does not need your contribution, neither does Stanley Jones. God only knows what may be accomplished by some lad at the Spanish American Institute or by some girl at the Frances DePauw School. The world has been in desperate need today, not so much of goods as of a glimpse of God and the assurance that to live for fine and high and holy things is not to live in vain. You can help them to that hope.

While I was in Sioux City this week they told me a most amazing story. Over in a certain district in Baltimore twenty years ago somebody conducted a survey. They found 300 boys and girls. It was the most hopeless and the most despairing and the most uninspiring slum in all that city. They kept track of these boys and girls and then twenty years afterward they hunted down as many of them as they could find. They found fine workers, they found some artists, they found an amazing record on the part of these 300 boys and girls that had the most unpromising environment and again and again they asked these youngsters what did it. "According to the sociologist charts and according to all of the city housing plans you were supposed to go wrong and you have gone right. What happened?" A man said, "Well, it was Aunt Hannah, I guess." A woman said, who was at the head of the public school, "I think it was Aunt Hannah that made the difference in me." Down the line they went and again and again they had this word "that Aunt Hannah."

Who was Aunt Hannah? She was a Christian school teacher in that community who kept saying to these poor boys and girls, "You can. You are divine. God made you for something better than slums. Be something. Be something." They justified her hope.

I told this story to the official board one night. I cannot tell it without emotion. I knew all the parties involved. There came to me one day in Minneapolis a boy of about 16. He was not a particularly attractive boy. There was a strange look in his eye. He had on a coat belonging to one suit, a vest belonging to another, trousers belonging to another suit. I said to him, "Where are you from?" "I am from the Washburn home." I knew the Washburn home. It was an orphan asylum only three or four blocks from where we lived. He said, "I am working out there for Mr. Young, who is the superintendent of that home." Some months afterwards he came and joined the church. He said, "I cannot give much. I think about 2¢ a week is about as much as I can give." So we did not list him among our large givers, we listed him among the great givers. One day he said to me, "I want you to meet Mr. Young sometime. He is the greatest man I ever knew." Then, he told me his story.

He could not remember his mother. His father died when he was a little fellow about 9. He was bound out to one family and his sister was bound out to another family. The man into whose care he was thrust did not want him and after a few months, on a trumped up charge, the boy was arrested for being an incorrigible and put into a penal institution. He had been in that penal institution for a period of months when one day they were lined up out on the campus for inspection. He was in the second line, standing straight and looking straight ahead. Out of the tail of his eye he suddenly discovered the man who was there for inspection had been his Sunday School teacher. It was the first time since he had gone into the institution that he had seen anybody he had known. In all the months he had been there, never had a letter from anybody who cared. He called out, "Hello there, Mr. Young." Then he knew he had broken the rule. An hour after that he was called into the office and then for some days after that he was in solitary confinement for breaking the rules. The boy said to me, "It was worth it just to see somebody that knew me and had cared for me." One day they opened the door, took him out of solitary confinement, and down to the office. He thought it was for some new discipline, but there was his Sunday School teacher who had hunted him down and found him, had gone on bond for whatever was necessary and was taking him out. For the first time in his life he had found somebody that cared. He went through college. He graduated from the university, took post graduate courses and is now in charge of one of the fine churches in the city of Duluth. A few days ago I had the responsibility of burying one of the greatest souls I had ever known. He was Gus Morrison's friend. A man who had spent his life lighting lamps in the lives of boys clear across the continent. That is the meaning, if you please, of this service this morning. The Woman's Home Missionary Society has been under the business of lighting lamps. They are asking you to share with them. Maybe you don't have the money this morning. Wouldn't you like to feel that you had had a share? Look at these little tots on this front row. What would it be worth to you to light a lamp for one of these little ones? Jesus said, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me."

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